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ABSTRACT

Rabbi Seymour N. Siegel presents four theses in the main address entitled "American Jews and Political Life": (1) Jewish voters as a group are more liberal than the general voting public. (2) Jewish organizations generally represent the views of their constituencies. (3) The liberal orientation in the Jewish community is true neither to Jewish interests nor to Jewish teachings, for both are conservative on social and political issues. (4) There are signs of a turn toward conservatism within the Jewish community. Responses to the theses are offered by Marshall J. Breger, a New York Law School professor and visiting fellow at the Heritage Foundation; Rabbi Joshua O. Haberman, Washington Hebrew Congregation (Reform); and David Saperstein, co-director and counsel of the Religious Action Center (Union of American Hebrew Congregations and Central Conference of American Rabbis), with a final word from the main speaker. Included are a foreword, an "Exchange with the Audience," and notes. (KWL)

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October 1983

Who Speaks For American Judaism?

Competing Approaches to Public Issues

Seymour N. Siegel

Responses by Marshall J. Breger, Joshua O. Haberman, David Saperstein

Foreword by Midge Decter

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This is one of a series of essays and reprints published by the Ethics and Public Policy Center to make available to a wider audience thoughtful perspectives on issues of domestic and foreign policy. Like original Center studies, the essays are written by authors who recognize the validity of fundamental Western values and attempt to combine moral reasoning with empirical analysis. The authors alone are responsible for the views expressed.

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Publisher's Note

THIS IS AN EDITED VERSION of one session of the Ethics and Public Policy Center's third annual conference, "Who Speaks for the Churches?," held in Washington in April 1983. The main address by Seymour N. Siegel is followed by three responses, to which Rabbi Siegel makes a brief reply. The final section is an exchange between the speakers and the audience.

Seymour N. Siegel, formerly a professor of ethics and theology at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, is the executive director of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council. Marshall J. Breger is a visiting fellow in legal policy at the Heritage Foundation and an associate professor at New York Law School. Joshua O. Haberman is the senior rabbi of Washington Hebrew Congregation (Reform), the largest Jewish congregation in the capital. David Saperstein is the co-director and counsel of the Religious Action Center (Union of American Hebrew Congregations and Central Conference of American Rabbis). Author and editor Midge Decter is the executive director of the Committee for the Free World.

Papers from another session of the 1983 conference are available in the same format under the title *How the Churches Speak to the World: Four Protestant Views*. The main address is by Lutheran theologian Richard John Neuhaus; the respondents are Methodist bishop Earl G. Hunt, Jr., religion professor Paul Ramsey, and African Methodist Episcopal bishop Philip R. Cousin.

Foreword

MIDGE DECTER

IT IS—TO BORROW Rabbi Seymour Siegel's allusion in his summary remarks at the end of the discussion presented here—in fear and trembling that I set down these brief words of introduction. For as everybody knows, the Jews constitute a profound mystery at the center of Western civilization; perhaps they are the one enduring mystery at the center of Western civilization.

The most mysterious thing about them is that they are here at all. Consider the history of the Jewish people alongside the history of other ancient peoples: a small nomadic tribe who, by whatever circumstance it pleases you to credit, seized upon the truth that God is One and Eternal—and a Giver of Laws—and who because of that single apprehension have down through the millennia weathered all the natural erosions of military defeat, dispersion, apostasy, and assimilation, and remained somehow intact, definable, and connected to one another. And consider, too, how beyond the natural erosions of history, each age, as it seems, has witnessed a brutal and fully conscious effort on the part of someone somewhere to make the Jews go away, disappear from off the face of the earth. Such an effort in Europe in the 1930s and 1940s, but for two small communities in the United States and Palestine, might have succeeded. Indeed, if one has recourse to simple daylight reason, it should have succeeded.

Yet here are the Jews, established once more in their biblical homeland and prospering in the United States—still small but vigorous and vital communities. All the disciplines of human rationality cannot suffice to explain to us how it is that the Jewish

people exists. Compared with that, questions like who actually speaks for American Jewry and how is it that this ancient people seems so markedly to have embraced all the most liberal attitudes of modernity would appear simple.

But are they?

To judge from this fascinating and revealing discussion among Rabbis Siegel, Haberman, and Saperstein and Mr. Breger, it must be concluded that nobody in particular speaks for American Jewry; that if, for instance, a greater proportion of the Jewish population than of any other ethnic group of comparable socio-economic status votes liberal, the matter can by no means be laid to rest there. There is no longer any formal structure of authority in the Jewish community, either in the synagogue or outside it. In addition, the Jewish political leaning toward liberalism is quite explicable sociologically. Particularly since Hitler, Jews have reflexively identified a region of the political geography popularly called "the Right" with anti-Semitism. Their now somewhat tarnished hope for something called "the Left" has been, consciously or unconsciously, the result of a self-protective impulse (a self-protective impulse, one might add, that—albeit in confusion and with reluctance—appears to be starting to give way before the onslaught of recent hard experience).

Be all this as it may, even in so seemingly self-evident an explanation there resides an element of mystery. Without a formal structure of authority, and with such varied readings of what Jewish tradition truly obligates one to in the secular realm—for that, of course, is the real nub of the discussion reproduced in this book—what is it that makes this "group" a genuine community? For that it is a genuine community certainly will not be denied by anyone who reads what follows, and indeed cannot be denied. And how can it continue to remain a community—which, despite disagreements on the most fundamental of issues, such as those aired here, it shows every promise of doing?

American Jews do decidedly speak for themselves: as sub-groups, splinters of sub-groups, special-interest groups—local, national, and international—even as individuals. Repeated efforts to "unify" them so that they might speak more effectively, in one voice, have foundered, and resulted in new splinters. And yet the

Jews persist and survive. And do more. Like the recent announcement that Bob Dylan had gone to the Lubavitcher Hasidic sect for instruction—no California cult, the Lubavitcher Hasidim, but people living under the real and rigorous disciplines of the Law—they surprise without surprising.

In short, looking at the American Jewish community today, one can describe it but one cannot "explain" it. Neither the kindness of American society to Jews nor the remaining pockets of unkindness, neither the iron grip of tradition nor the various movements to adapt that tradition to conditions of modern life—none of these will do to unravel the mystery. Any of these factors could just as rationally be summoned up to account for the disappearance of the Jewish community.

What was not for understandable reasons touched upon in this discussion is the issue of divine intervention. Surely the fact that a majority of American Jews have for some time now been voting for the Democratic party and that they have recently commenced to show signs of uncertainty and confusion on that score cannot in all good sense be traced to their obedience to or rebellion against the will of their Creator. Still, the suspicion lingers: the Jews remain, among other things to trouble the consciousness of their non-Jewish contemporaries, because, and only because, their very existence must be part of some unknowable divine purpose. That purpose hovers unacknowledged over this most valuable and instructive conversation, adding immeasurably to its value for all those who wish to understand this obdurately surviving people.

American Jews and Political Life

SEYMOUR N. SIEGEL

I often think it's comical
How nature always does contrive
That every boy and every gal,
That's born into the world alive,
Is either a little Liberal,
Or else a little Conservative!

The observation above, made by a self-described "intellectual chap" in Gilbert and Sullivan's *Iolanthe*, seems to apply to everyone except the Jewish voter. There are very few little, or big, Jewish conservatives. Among the various ethnic groups in the United States, Jews find themselves disproportionately on the liberal side.

This, then, is my first thesis: Jewish voters as a group are much more liberal than the general voting public. My second is that the Jewish organizations, unlike some non-Jewish organizations, generally represent the views of their constituencies. The third thesis, assuredly a controversial one, is that this liberal orientation in the Jewish community is true neither to Jewish interests nor to Jewish teachings, which are both very conservative on social and political issues. And fourth, there are signs of a turn toward conservatism within the Jewish community.

Jewish attitudes on social and political issues were most recently reported by Steven Cohen in the *American Jewish Year Book 1983*.[1] Cohen's data, assembled in 1982, are based on a carefully selected sampling of Jewish opinions. These opinions are compared with those of the general American population. Cohen

concludes that "Jews apparently remain more liberal than the rest of society, but their marked liberalism is of a selective nature." Some striking comparisons: 73 per cent of the Jewish respondents, compared to 45 per cent of the general population, support passage of the Equal Rights Amendment; 67 per cent of the Jews, compared to 45 per cent of the general population, think declared homosexuals should be allowed to teach in public schools; 52 per cent of the Jews and 40 per cent of the general population think it is all right for the government to pay for abortions.

Interestingly, fewer Jews (56 per cent) than others (66 per cent) take a liberal position on affirmative action. Despite this, Jews are somewhat more inclined (20 per cent versus 10 per cent) to use quotas to help disadvantaged groups; and 23 per cent as against 12 per cent support busing as a means of integrating schools.

Despite their relative affluence, 58 per cent of the Jewish respondents oppose cuts in spending on social welfare, and 49 per cent of them reject calls for substantial increases in defense spending.

The figures on political self-identification are interesting. Among Jewish respondents, 34 per cent (as against 21 per cent in the general population) consider themselves liberal or radical, 49 per cent (versus 36 per cent) moderate, and 17 per cent (versus 43 per cent) conservative. In party affiliation Jewish voters are 66 per cent Democratic, 11 per cent Republican, and 24 per cent independent.* The figures available for the nation as a whole are 47 per cent Democratic, 27 per cent Republican, and 26 per cent independent. Alan Fisher has reported that 34 per cent of Jewish voters, as against 55 per cent of voters in the whole nation, voted for Reagan.[2]

In short, the data presented by Cohen confirm the general observation that Jewish voters, as a whole, are considerably more liberal than American voters in general. Though we do not have data on such questions as the proposed nuclear freeze, tuition tax credits, and prayer in the public schools, it is obvious to those who move around the Jewish community that Jews are not generally in line with the prevailing American opinion on these points.

*The figures in the *Year Book* here add up to 101 per cent.—Ed.

The observations of the Cohen study seem to be confirmed by data released by the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research.[3] Here again answers to political questions were correlated with "religious preference." In party affiliation, the figures for Jews (with the comparable figures for *Protestants* in parentheses) were 19.6 per cent (15.9 Protestant) strong Democrat, 36.8 (24.5) not strong Democrat, 17.4 (10.9) independent near Democrat, 11.8 (11.5) independent, 1.2 (9.3) strong Republican, 5.6 (17.8) not strong Republican. Figures for liberal-conservative self-perception with the corresponding figures for *Catholics* are 3.7 per cent (1.7 Catholic) extremely liberal, 26 (11.8) liberal, 17.8 (15.4) slightly liberal, 34.7 (42.5) moderate, 10.5 (16) slightly conservative, 6.8 (11) conservative, and 0.5 (1.6) very conservative.

On a question about the dealth penalty, the Jewish respondent is in line with the rest of the population: 67.9 per cent of the Protestants, 71.4 of the Catholics, and 68.5 of the Jews favor restoring the death penalty for murder. Only 39.2 of the Jewish sample, compared to 54.8 of the Catholics and 63.5 of the Protestants, favor the firing of a Communist teacher; and 65.4 per cent of the Jews (48.2 Catholics, 36.7 Protestants) would allow an anti-religionist to teach. These figures reflect, as do the Cohen figures, the strong Jewish espousal of civil liberties. Nearly all the Jewish respondents (96.9 per cent) favor abortion where there is a serious defect in the fetus, and 86.3 approve of abortion for a low-income woman who can't afford more children.

Political Views and Ritual Observance

Very interesting are Cohen's figures relating political views and ritual observance. Respondents were classified into four groups: (1) observant, (2) moderately observant, (3) minimally observant, and (4) secular—i.e., hardly any ritual observance. Surprisingly, the two groups that are most conservative are the observant and the secular: 25 per cent of the observant, 20 per cent of the secular, 19 per cent of the moderate, and 11 per cent of the minimally observant consider themselves conservative. The greater conservatism among the observant corresponds to the fact that Judaism as a whole is basically conservative. The more observant Jews are more "ethnic" in their voting behavior, also; that is, they think

more in terms of their Jewishness than in terms of the universal feelings they share with non-Jews. It is natural for these observant Jews to ally themselves with more conservative groups, which tend to be pro-Israel and pro-tradition, rather than with the more liberal groups. The least observant or secular Jews tend to be more assimilated into the general culture. "They are highly integrated into non-Jewish society, are distant from the semi-segregated Jewish subsociety, and are relatively untouched by the Jewish liberal subculture," says Cohen.[4]

It should not be forgotten that the Jewish citizen is better educated and much more urbanized than the average American. His liberalism reflects his socio-economic status as well as his ethnic-religious affiliation.

I do not have figures on foreign policy views in the Jewish community. One thing certain is that Jews are almost unanimously pro-Israel. This pro-Israel stance has served to awaken them to the realities of certain foreign policy issues. For example, it is rare to find a Jewish spokesman who promotes the United Nations as the "last hope of democracy." Jews tend to be little affected by the mystique of the "Third World." They can hardly feel open and trustful toward the Soviet Union when millions of Jews are being oppressed there.

Rabbis in all three groupings have responded favorably to the message of working for a "nuclear freeze." For example, in April 1983 the Conservative rabbis assembled in convention "urged the governments of the U.S.A. and U.S.S.R. to implement a bilateral, mutually verifiable total cessation of the production and deployment of nuclear weapons." This was said to be in keeping with the teachings of Judaism, "which stresses the pursuit of peace." On this point the Conservative rabbis mirror the expressed sentiments of both the Reform and the Orthodox rabbis.

THE JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS

The Jewish community in the United States, numbering some six million persons, is the largest and most influential community of Jews in the world. Indeed, it is probably the greatest Jewish community in history.

The biblical admonition "be fruitful and multiply" seems to have been well observed by Jewish organizations. In the mid-seventeenth century, when the first Jews arrived on these shores, they began to organize themselves for religious, cultural, and philanthropic purposes. American Judaism now presents a plethora of confusing and overlapping organizations and groups.

One source of confusion about American Judaism is the nature of Jewish faith itself. The Jewish faith is the faith of a people. It is rooted in the Covenant made between the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and the Almighty. It is the *people* that is the bearer of the life of faith and service. Jews belong first to a people, and when they are faithful they commit themselves to the people's destiny and covenant. Jews are both an ethnic group and a religious group. A Jew can belong to his people and not accept the faith (either in part or as a whole) of the people; he can be a Jew without ever attending the synagogue. This is particularly true in modern times with the emergence of "Jewish secularism," an interpretation of Jewish existence based on purely ethnic or national considerations. Some of the most famous Jews of this century—such as Golda Meir, David Ben-Gurion, and Sigmund Freud—are in this category.

Religious Organizations

There are in American Judaism, then, two parallel strands, the religious and the "secular." In the religious sphere there are basically three main groupings. The *Orthodox* wing, to which about 10 per cent of the Jewish population belongs, affirms ancient rabbinic law as normative. This group includes several subgroups. The "mainline Orthodox" have two main organizations, the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations (the lay organization) and the Rabbinical Council of America. These two groups have conventions and pass resolutions, but they keep these activities quiet, and the record is very difficult to obtain.

The most acculturated Jewish religious grouping is the *Reform* or liberal, which began in Germany at the start of the nineteenth century and pursued a program of modernizing Jewish beliefs and practices. From the very start, the Reform movement has been committed to social action, and in many of its theoretical formula-

tions it has been similar to the American Protestant social gospel movement. Its lay organization is the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. The rabbis in the movement—currently more than a thousand—are organized in the Central Conference of American Rabbis. The Central Conference holds annual conventions, publishes detailed yearbooks and protocols, and has issued many resolutions on political and social questions.

The *Conservative* grouping, numerically the largest in American Judaism, espouses a middle-of-the-road approach of trying to combine tradition and change. Its lay organization is called the United Synagogue; the rabbinical arm is the Rabbinical Assembly.

These six organizations are united in the Synagogue Council of America, an umbrella organization that frequently issues pronouncements. The Synagogue Council is bound by a unanimity rule: if one group objects, the proposed resolution is vetoed. It does not actually coordinate the activities of its member groups but rather serves as a kind of convenient address for religious American Jewry.

Secular Organizations

The "secular" Jewish organizations that are the best known in the United States are B'nai B'rith and its Anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Committee, and the American Jewish Congress. There are numerous others. These organizations are called secular not because they eschew religious topics but because they are designed to deal with the issues that affect the Jews as an ethnic group—such as philanthropy, defense against anti-Semitism, and the promotion of good relations with other ethnic or religious groups. Rabbis are often active in the secular organizations, and often the secular groups promote such causes as religious education and scholarly activity that might be expected to be the province of religious groups. Most of these organizations are active in political and social areas.

The most inclusive organization is the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, an umbrella group that includes both religious and non-religious organizations. It makes frequent pronouncements and issues an annual guide called the Joint Pro-

gram Plan to be used by the member organizations and the many Jewish community-relations councils that exist throughout the country. The decisions of this body are not always unanimous. Dissent is included, and the dissent is useful for assessing the views of the Orthodox groups, which, as I said, do not ordinarily publish their own views.

Policy Positions of Jewish Organizations

It is fair to say that by and large the Jewish organizations have supported the standard liberal positions (there are one or two notable exceptions, as we shall see). In this they were reflecting the opinions of the Jewish community.

In an excellent article in *Commentary* (December 1981) Murray Friedman, director of the Philadelphia branch of the American Jewish Committee, outlined the ideological bases for the actions of the Jewish agencies.[5] In the early post-war years, the leaders felt that the furtherance of the liberal agenda would ultimately help Jews as well as other minorities. This agenda included anti-discrimination statutes on the national and local level and the removal of religious practices from the public arena, especially the public schools. The Jewish agencies believed that their programs were aimed at a better life for Jews and for the whole society. Friedman points out that the idealism of the Jewish professionals who largely shaped the programs "was heavily molded by their ideology. The new class of professionals . . . shared a liberal-Left perspective."[6]

In a 1945 essay, Alexander Pekelis, a leading spokesman for the American Jewish Congress, said (as quoted by Friedman), "American Jews will find more reasons for taking an affirmative attitude toward being Jews as members of an organized movement, if they are part and parcel of a great American and human force working for a better world . . . whether or not the individual issues involved touch directly upon so-called Jewish interests. The tradition and fate of [Jews] are indissolubly bound to those of the forces of liberalism."[7] This viewpoint was reflected in a favorable feeling toward the welfare state, and especially in a zeal for removing religious practices and interests from public education. The Jewish

professionals earnestly believed that in working toward these goals they were helping to safeguard Jews from harassment. However, their activities reflected a "secular bias" that the absence of all religion in public institutions was better than the presence of any particular religion.

The liberal perspective also appeared in a Jewish internationalism that celebrated the United Nations and world law. The United Nations presents an interesting case of a basic change in a Jewish policy position brought on by Jewish interests (especially those of Israel). In 1945 the (Reform) Central Conference of American Rabbis expressed its "regret . . . that the United States did not take the lead in voicing its readiness to surrender some of its sovereignty for the welfare of all nations." In 1950 the (Conservative) Rabbinical Assembly urged its members to "seek the development of the U.N. into a world federation . . . with definite and limited powers adequate to preserve peace and prevent aggression through enactment, interpretation, and enforcement of world law." In 1950 the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council (NJCRAC) said, "We recommend that the United States take the lead in proposing revisions of the U.N. Charter to eliminate the veto by one government of decisions arrived at by a substantial majority of all other governments." In 1962 the NJCRAC said that "we acknowledge our wholehearted support of the U.N. bonds." It added that its members should "marshall vigorous support for the U.N." Yet in 1976 the NJCRAC commented that at least some U.N. votes had no relevance to "reasoned judgments, morality, or international welfare." It also spoke of a decline in the U.N. and "the erosion of its usefulness." The group called on the United States to "revise the levels of its support and participation . . . and to work outside the U.N. if the situation warrants."

This striking reversal is due, of course, to the U.N.'s votes on Israel and Zionism. Similarly, there has been very little Jewish support for "the Third World" in recent years because of the almost universal hostility of that group of nations to the state of Israel.

Affirmative-action programs with their overtones of quotas strike a note of fear in many Jewish minds. The goals of the

proponents of affirmative action would clearly jeopardize some Jewish positions in the public sector, especially in education; for instance, preferential treatment of protected minorities would deprive some Jews of the chance to attend certain professional schools and prestigious universities. This forms part of a larger picture of increased tension between Jews and blacks. In fact, the 1980-81 Joint Program Plan of the NJCRAC contains a section on "anti-Semitism in the black community." This unhappy phenomenon is tied to such factors as the "growing sense of kinship among some blacks with people of the 'Third World.'" Yet the Plan went on to place a major share of the responsibility on the shoulders of Jews themselves, noting a "progressive distancing of the steadily more secure (economically) and accepted (socially) Jewish community from problems of still relatively insecure and disadvantaged minorities" and even an "anti-black animus among Jews."

It is clear that affirmative-action programs, which inevitably lead to some sort of quotas, are not favored in the Jewish community. In the famous 1978 Bakke case, in which the Supreme Court limited the quota system in college admissions, no Jewish agency filed a brief against Bakke, though the entire civil rights community was against him. Yet the 1982-83 Joint Program Plan of the NJCRAC states that "the existing NJCRAC statement on affirmative action is silent on whether quotas may be ordered as a remedy of last resort for proven instances of discrimination. . . . The American Jewish Congress (and some other Jewish groups) wishes to note its belief that NJCRAC should recognize that there are limited circumstances—where there is a history of past discrimination—under which the courts should be allowed to impose quota remedies if no other remedy is available."

The 1982-83 NJCRAC Plan

It is interesting to peruse the 1982-83 Joint Program Plan of the NJCRAC (remember that the majority of Jewish agencies, secular and religious, belong to this group). The content, by and large, differs little from the platform of the Democratic party. In assessing the economic situation of the country, the Plan attacks the Reagan administration for cutting food stamps, aid-to-families, and job-training programs. There is no recognition of the Adminis-

tration's arguments that cutting expenditures reduces inflation and helps the poor. Rather the Plan states, "Inflation and interest rates have been falling, but as a result, some have suggested, of the economy's poor prospects, which are reflected in a drop in consumer and loan demands. They warn that if the economy picks up, interest rates and inflation will soar again." The Plan attacks the political philosophy that "would increasingly diminish the role of government as intervenor on behalf of the less advantaged and less powerful" and denigrates the "new federalism," which strengthens local governments' ability to deal with social problems.

The Plan advocates a "swift, simple, and humane amnesty for undocumented aliens who arrived in the United States before a specified prior date, with entitlement to national and local government services during any waiting period prior to admission for permanent residence." It expresses alarm that "civil rights advances, forged so painstakingly over the past twenty years, are in serious jeopardy by the actions of the current Administration." It calls for passage of the Equal Rights Amendment. The section on women's rights expresses opposition to the Human Life Amendment and supports the *Roe* v. *Wade* decision legalizing abortion. The document cites no sources on the subject but mentions that "public opinion polls . . . continue to show a significant percentage of Americans favoring the right to choose abortion under a variety of circumstances." It is interesting to note that the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America opposes any public policy encouraging abortion, unless sanctioned by Jewish traditional law.

The NJCRAC Plan opposes tuition tax credits for families sending their children to private schools. However, the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations supports the Moynihan-Packwood tax credit proposal and also the use of voucher plans. The (Conservative) Rabbinical Assembly also came out in favor of tuition tax credits in 1983.

The NJCRAC Plan offers the expected opposition to prayer in the public schools. The Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations, however, does not object to silent meditation. It also "questions the propriety of the Jewish community being in the forefront of efforts to prohibit the posting of the Ten Commandments in public

schools." The Synagogue Council of America joined the Baptist Joint Committee, the National Coalition for Public Education, and the National Council of Churches in condemning a proposed constitutional amendment allowing prayer in the public schools. It should be noted that such strong Orthodox groups as Agudath Israel and the Lubavitch Foundation support both tuition tax credits and prayer in the public schools. There is also in the NJCRAC Plan an attack on the Moral Majority as a threat to pluralism.

It is interesting that this program guide has no word on issues of national defense or nuclear strategy.

In short, the Jewish organizations speak for most of the Jewish voters as indicated by the polling data. It is questionable whether these stances really reflect Jewish *interests* or Jewish *teachings*, though by and large they do reflect Jewish *opinion*.

The substantial minority of Jews who are politically conservative are poorly represented. The only organization, to my knowledge, that avowedly speaks for a non-liberal position is the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs, considered a minor group that promotes the idea of a strong national defense.

Liberalism and Judaism

There has been considerable discussion about the roots of Jewish liberalism. Most characteristic is the statement by Lawrence Fuchs, who in *The Political Behavior of American Jews* attributes the prevalent attitude to Jewish cultural values. His thesis is that a tradition that stresses philanthropy and scholarship would perforce favor groups that seemingly stand for the increase of government intervention on behalf of public welfare and groups that promote free access to education.

Ben Halpern, a professor at Brandeis University, argues differently. He suggests that from Roman times until the modern period, the Jews generally saw a stable and unchallenged social system as their security.[8] The Jewish population was in danger when the bonds of order were severed and the mob took charge. Central authority meant protection and order. Historically therefore the Jews were conservative, striving to preserve the existing political

structure. The famous Jewish socialists and revolutionaries such as Marx had first to break with the Jewish religious community before they could commit themselves to radical visions. "The tradition of Jewish liberalism is a recent development whose relation to a truly traditional view of Judaism is highly questionable," says Halpern.

In the Spring 1964 issue of *Judaism* magazine, Professor Michael Wyschogrod wrote:

> Judaism has never been radical in the economic or political sense of that word. It has been a religion of law against anarchy, of reverence for the past and love for its traditions and heritage. It has always had a very realistic appraisal of what lurks in man and the necessity for social and political bounds within which responsible freedom is exercised.

To what, then, can we attribute Jewish liberalism? Halpern points to the historical fact that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries self-identified liberals championed Jewish emancipation, while self-styled conservatives generally opposed Jewish strivings for civil rights. The resulting Jewish approbation of liberal groups carried over to the contemporary scene. If this is true, then Jewish liberalism is the result not of "idealism" but of Jewish self-interest, as that was perceived. However, to many it seems that whatever liberals contributed to Jewish progress in the past, today's political liberalism is true neither to Jewish teachings nor to Jewish interests. Judaism is a traditionalist religion and is conservative in its basic character.

Characteristic Liberal Attitudes

Political analysts identify ten general attitudes as characteristic of contemporary liberalism:

1. A tendency to favor liberty over order. Liberals are inclined to support liberty even when there is a threat to public order. They tend to oppose any kind of censorship and to support a very broad interpretation of civil rights.

2. A tendency to favor government intervention over private initiative. Liberals see a strong central government as the most important means of combatting evil conditions. They favor public schools over private schools, public welfare over private philanthropy.

3. A tendency to explain human behavior in terms of environment rather than individual will. A highly optimistic view of human nature leads them to believe that human misery is primarily caused not by a lack of stamina or will but by a bad environment, which can be modified.

4. A tendency to favor equality of possession over equality of opportunity. Liberals support an egalitarian society based on a redistribution of income. They want to see that all persons finish the race at the same time, rather than making sure that they all get an equal start. An associated view is that if a disproportionate part of a certain group fails a test, it is the fault of the examination, not of the examinees.

5. A tendency to favor universal characteristics over particularistic ones. Liberals emphasize the factors that make people alike, rather than those that make them different. They therefore tend to downgrade nationalism, ethnic self-identification (except for blacks), and endogamy (marriage within a group). This leads to a view that all people are basically alike and that it is wrong to accentuate the elements that make them different.

6. A tendency to favor left-revolutionary movements and nations. Revolutionary states are seen as the bearers of social justice, even though they can be faulted for some "excesses." The injustices of Castro's Cuba and the Sandinistas' Nicaragua are excused, while those of South Africa, Argentina, and other pariah nations are unequivocally condemned.

7. A tendency to relegate religion to the private sphere. Liberals are strongly committed to the complete separation of church and state. Religion is seen as a private concern, with no right to government support. Public education should be insulated from religious influence as well as protected from the competition of private schools.

8. A tendency to denigrate tradition in favor of novelty and innovation. The past is only the prologue to a glorious future. Tradition represents oppressive restraints.

9. A tendency to prefer change according to rational principle instead of in accordance with specific circumstances. Liberals support change even when the situation does not require it.

10. A tendency to believe that all problems are soluble. This

belief is the cornerstone of the liberal view. Human nature is perfectible, history can redeem itself, and human efforts can bring about utopia by abolishing war, poverty, and disease.

Traditional Jewish Teaching

These ten tendencies are characteristic of the liberal outlook. Most of them are at variance with traditional Jewish teaching. For instance (in response to tendency 1), Judaism has high esteem for the virtue of order. "Pray for the welfare of the government," the rabbis advise, "for were it not for the fear of the government, people would swallow each other alive." (2) Because Judaism is suspicious of the accumulation of power in one center, it tends to favor private initiative over government intervention. (3) Judaism stresses individual responsibility. Although the environment is important, the person is the locus of responsibility. (4) The teachers of Israel recognized that there would always be inequality in society. They did not teach that wealth was to be redistributed. Rather they insisted on fairness and justice. People who were poor or weak were not to be treated unfairly; they were to stand equally with the rich and powerful before the bar of justice. The Bible warns against favoring either the rich or the poor in judgment. (5) Judaism recognizes the importance of the particular in man. The rabbis praise the wisdom of God in creating differences among human beings. When one sees a multitude of people, the rabbis say, he is obliged to praise God's actions in making each human being unique. (6) The history of modern Judaism shows inordinate difficulties with leftist regimes. No Jewish community has flourished in a Marxist atmosphere, whether it is the anti-Semitic government of the Soviet Union or the philo-Semitic regime of Fidel Castro. Jews thrive under conditions of opportunity, openness, and freedom rather than under economic control or centralized planning. (8-9) If there is one central principle in Jewish teaching, it is the importance of tradition, in which is reflected the will of Providence. Jews believe, with conservatives, that "when it is not necessary to change, it is necessary not to change." All societies change. However, as Disraeli put it, "the great question is not whether you should resist change, which is inevitable, but

whether that change should be carried on in deference to the manners, the customs, the laws, the traditions of the people or in deference to abstract principles and arbitrary general doctrines." Jews, when they are in the Tradition, oppose certain radical changes such as the removal of all restrictions on abortion, the casual acceptance of homosexuality as merely an alternative lifestyle, and attacks on the traditional concept of the family.

Not only Jewish teachings but also Jewish interests are better served by conservative than by liberal political viewpoints. Judaism unquestionably stands for social justice, fairness, and compassion. However, the way American liberals apply these principles tends to compromise some legitimate Jewish interests. For example, Jews have always fought for reward according to merit rather than on the basis of extrinsic factors such as race or national origin. They have felt (correctly, I believe) that if everyone is given a fair chance, Jews and the rest of the population will benefit. But liberals have abandoned the merit system to espouse affirmative action and quotas. The drive to achieve "racial balance" in the schools and in political appointments is a serious threat to the idea of merit.

The liberal's commitment to public education and strong opposition to any form of assistance to non-public schools is another point at which Jewish interests collide with liberal ideology. Growing numbers of Jewish leaders believe that the future vigor of the community depends in great measure on the intensive education provided by the Jewish day school. Yet liberal-controlled Jewish money is spent on fighting initiatives of the federal and state governments to help religiously oriented schools.

In the international sphere, the main Jewish interest is, of course, the security of Israel. At the moment the major threats to the Jewish state are posed by the countries of the Communist bloc and the United Nations. Many liberals are caught up in the mystique of the Third World. But it should be clear that any weakening of resistance to Communist infiltration in Africa and Latin America is bad not only for the United States but also for Israel. The Jewish community ought to be in the forefront of the fight against Marxist-Leninist forces.

The Turn Toward Conservatism

A new mood is evident in the Jewish community. Many leading thinkers of the conservative renaissance, such as Irving Kristol, Nathan Glazer, Norman Podhoretz, Midge Decter, and Milton Friedman, are Jewish. New organizations of conservative Jews are springing up, though they are not yet strong enough to challenge their well-established liberal counterparts. It is clear to this commentator that we will see a turnaround in the prevailing Jewish outlook. The sources of this hope are (1) Israel and (2) a resurgence of traditionalism.

Israel, which is central in the thoughts of Jews, has become a kind of laboratory in which to test various political views. Israel has shown that the U.N. is a sham; that the Third World is basically hypocritical; that a strong defense is the best guarantee against attack; and that a socialist economy (which Israel has had, though currently it is dominated by non-socialists) can make even the Jewish reputation for expertise in commerce questionable. I believe that the problems of Israel have been a powerful lesson in the truth of some of the non-liberal nostrums. It may be because of this that so many radical groups are anti-Israel.

The Jewish organizations are, as far as I know, the only religious organizations that have called on their constituents to urge only minimal U.S. support for the United Nations. That is a result, of course, of such U.N. outrages as "Zionism is racism" resolutions.

Israel is teaching a growing number of Jews the importance of combatting the Soviet threat, of maintaining a strong defense in order to survive in a sea of enmity. I might say that it is also teaching me, at least, the difficult lesson that the only religious kind of politics is secular politics; that is, except for general moral principles, to base judgments about such specific matters as borders on biblical verses is fraught with danger.

This, then, is one source of my hope for the Jewish community: that through Israel the Jews will relearn the forgotten lessons of the past—that the state of Israel will be a light not only to the other nations but to the Jews themselves.

The other signal for hope, in my judgment, is the resurgence of Jewish traditionalism. Traditionalism and even fundamentalism

seem now to be among the most dynamic forces in the Jewish community, and orthodox and fundamentalist Jews tend to be very conservative politically.

Republican candidates get most of their Jewish votes, not in affluent Jewish suburbs, but in poorer, more orthodox Jewish parts of the city. This is because the urban Jews confront the realities of American life more directly than their more insulated suburban brethren. Orthodox and some Conservative Jews are also closer to the teaching of the Tradition. They cannot accept abortion merely as a matter of "a woman's right to choose," or gay rights as merely "another civil rights issue." They are more intensely pro-Israel, and they have no desire to see the weakening of U.S. defenses, whether through a nuclear freeze or through cuts in the defense budget. They are more aware of the possibilities of evil in the human heart, the dangers of totalitarianism, and the necessity of a strong defense of democracy.

The more traditional the Jewish community becomes, the more likely it will be to see the wisdom of a more conservative political stance. In the future there may be little Conservatives as well as little Liberals in the American Jewish community, as in all other sectors of our society.

Responses

1. MARSHALL J. BREGER

As our topic today focuses on questions of authority and legitimacy, I must first disclaim all legitimate authority for speaking on this subject. I am neither fish nor fowl in this gathering. I am not a theologian, nor am I a sociologist or a historian. I fall, instead, within the category of cantankerous, committed layman, and my remarks should be understood in that vein.

The question posed for this session, "Who speaks for the Jews?," is a strange query for Jewish ears. In Judaism there is no institutional church. There is no sense that a specific person or body—the Pope, the College of Cardinals—might speak for the entire religious community. Since the Second Commonwealth there has been no supranational institutional hierarchy. Therefore the appeal to authority in Jewish tradition cannot turn on appeals to institutional legitimacy. Of course, certain countries at certain periods had institutional hierarchies with Chief Rabbis and the like, and most European countries today (as well as Israel) have Chief Rabbis and rabbinical courts that deal with matters of ritual, marriage, and divorce for the orthodox community. But they are not given, nor do they claim, supreme institutional authority to speak for the orthodox Jewish community. Authority in Jewish law derives from communal acknowledgment of an individual's learning and does not flow merely from the authority that goes with a particular office. In *halachic* Judaism it is the authority of learning, not the authority of office, that is determinative in the interpretation of Jewish law.

The question "Who speaks for the Jews?" must therefore be understood either as an empirical one—"Who speaks for the

Jewish community?"—or as a normative one—"Who can claim religious authority to represent Jewish sources and tradition?" The first reading of the question provides essentially a counting problem and largely reflects political and secular concerns. The second reading raises complex normative problems of religious authority.

On the secular side, there is a Jewish defense "establishment" consisting of such organizations as the Anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Congress, and the American Jewish Committee. These organizations have attempted to defend community interests (as they understand them). Unlike the Board of Deputies in England or the Consistoire in France, however, they can make no constitutional claims to represent the Jewish community. Nonetheless these organizations reflect significant bodies of opinion within the American Jewish community, and their views carry substantial weight.

On the religious side, there are, in America, rabbis and, to some extent, organizations of rabbis—the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the Rabbinical Assembly, and the Rabbinical Council of America. These collectivities of rabbis rarely, if ever, claim to speak in an institutional sense for the Jewish people. Indeed, the very question of a rabbi or group of rabbis speaking with religious authority is a complex issue. All opinions are not so cloaked—only "performative utterances," to use the philosopher's phrase.

Speaking for Jewish Self-Interest

When individuals or groups claim to speak for the Jewish community, they may be making a number of different claims. They may be claiming to speak in the self-interest of the Jewish community, along the lines of what piece of the pie the Jewish community will or should have. For example, when the Anti-Defamation League says that there should be a minority grant set aside for Hassidic Jews in the Small Business Administration Section 8 loan program—i.e., that they should be called a minority, too—the League is speaking not out of religious motives but out of Jewish self-interest. It is arguing that if other groups are going to get special privileges, why should not the Jewish poor? Similarly, the Jewish position on quotas and affirmative action is, in some measure, one of self-interest. Because they have a long legacy of having

suffered from quotas, it is natural for Jews to fear that the new breed of quotas—those carrying "benign intent"—will affect them adversely. This is especially true for Jews in civil service and public education, where the "merit system," while often imperfect in implementation, has protected minorities from the ravages of discrimination and the arbitrary use of discretion.

Some have claimed that the promotion of universal liberal concerns has been good for the Jews, that the fate of the Jews is indissolubly bound with the fate of liberalism. In this view, then, it is in the long-term self-interest of the Jews to have universal concerns rather than to focus on narrow, particularistic concerns. There is much historical support for this view. In the nineteenth century, those groups that wanted to grant full citizenship to the Jews and bring them into the wider community were generally from the liberal side of the political spectrum. Those who opposed emancipation for the Jews came mainly from the conservative parties. Rabbi Siegel is clearly correct in his assessment that historically, since the Enlightenment, Jews have been liberal, both politically and culturally. Further, I agree with his judgment that there are signs now that the community is politically veering toward conservatism.

Speaking for Jewish Tradition

A second kind of claim that one speaks for the Jews is a claim that one speaks for Jewish tradition. For most Jews, this claim depends on the weight one gives to the institutional body or the rabbi making the pronouncement. In a Hassidic community, for example, where the rabbi is revered as wise in all things, his pronouncements on morality would be attended to very carefully. In other religious contexts, while the rabbi may be listened to as an informed if not revered figure, his views will, perforce, lack the mandate of religious authority.

From the perspective of traditional Judaism, the only area in which the statements of the rabbi carry religious authority is when he speaks as an interpreter of Jewish law or *halacha*. I can speak here only sketchily of the *halachic* process, the method of decision-making in Jewish law. For our purposes it is sufficient to recognize that the process is dyadic in character—an observant

Jew asks a learned rabbinical authority what Jewish law requires in such and such a circumstance. While an actual "case or controversy" may not be required (as in the American judicial system), judicial decisions are generally made in the light of specific facts. Taking a strict-constructionist rather than judicial-activist approach, the rabbi looks at the individual case brought before him. He then tells an inquiring Jew what Jewish law requires in a particular situation. Only rarely are *takkanot*, or general regulations, laid down for the entire community. The emphasis on the factual context of legal decision-making limits a rabbi's capacity to speak of political issues in *halachic* terms.

On the other hand, from the perspective of rabbinic Judaism—of normative Judaism—it is very difficult to say that Jewish law should be limited to religious matters, because indeed it is not. Here I must confess to a disagreement with Rabbi Siegel. Jewish law is not limited to matters of ritual and prayer. Its scope allows it to give guidance and, indeed, to give decisions on commercial matters and on social and political issues. Therefore it is difficult to say, in principle at least, that Jewish law is not relevant to political decision-making. How it should be relevant, the way in which it should relate to political matters, what particular laws should be used, is a different story.

This is both a theological point and a methodological point. It distinguishes Judaism from many Protestant confessional denominations and underscores what many have called its "this world" aspect. If a religion is intimately involved in this world (in contrast to "the world to come"), it cannot avoid social, economic, and political matters, and indeed, Judaism does not. The problem, of course, is how and when to speak.

Views at Variance

A number of Jewish organizations, both communal and religious, have recently issued statements supportive in varying degrees of nuclear freeze proposals.[1] Others have appointed commissions to explore the Jewish law implications of a nuclear arsenal.[2] Indeed, one Jewish religious grouping, the Reconstructionist Movement, has opened an anti-nuclear response center devoted to the study of Jewish perspectives on nuclear issues.[3] Some of these

resolutions have been based on assessments of communal self-interest; others lay claim to the authority of "the prophetic passion for peace."[4]

In contrast, Agudath Israel, an Orthodox religious organization, has rejected the "nuclear freeze" perspective, arguing that it is "an oversimplification of Jewish tradition to interpret reverence for life as an argument for a nuclear freeze."[5] In their view, while "peace is a religious imperative, so is a strong national defense." The debate is primarily a political one, turning on public assessment of expert military, scientific, and geopolitical claims. Given factual uncertainty as to whether a freeze will assist or further complicate the "peace" process, Agudath Israel suggests that religious pronouncements are inappropriate.

This sampling of the variety of Jewish viewpoints regarding the nuclear freeze suggests the central problem in responding to the question "Who speaks for the Jews?" The appeal from communal self-interest must be separated from the appeal from religious tradition. While religious law penetrates all spheres of endeavor, the appropriateness of buttressing political views with religious authority depends on the factual context presented. It is incumbent on all parties who purport to speak for some segment of the Jewish community to make clear with what voice they have chosen to speak—and to defend their positions within the parameters of their perspective, be it political or religious. This modest self-discipline would aid analysis and prevent acrimony, and it would help us understand the status and authority of those prescriptions, both political and religious, that Jewish groups might offer in our increasingly complex world.

Furthermore, use of this basic distinction may allow us to separate out those elements of the historic Jewish predilection toward liberalism that flow from affinities of time and place and those elements that may be embedded in Jewish law and values. The claim that historical Jewish sympathy with liberalism is based on elements of the "prophetic tradition," if not of Jewish law, has normative significance for assessing the status of political appeals in Jewish communal life. In this context the question "Who speaks for the Jews?" takes on more than academic import.

2. JOSHUA O. HABERMAN

The synagogue itself may be the major institution in Jewish life, the one with the greatest tradition, perhaps the deepest influence, but it is not the sole spokesman for American Jewry. From the very beginning American Jewry—not necessarily all Jewish communities in the world, but particularly the American one—has been extremely reluctant to entrust itself to the care of a single spokesman or single institution.

This debate that has been raging in American Jewish life for well over a century is known by the technical term of *centralism*. By and large the majority of Jewish lay people and leaders object to centralized authority, whether of rabbis or lay people or communal leaders. The most we have been able to accomplish has been gradually to entrust different concerns and interests to different spokesmen. In other words, we have rather clearly defined spokesmen for various matters of importance to American Jews.

Organizational Leadership

For example, the organized religious body is represented in matters of theology and ethics and interfaith relations by the Synagogue Council of America. But the Synagogue Council of America is just an umbrella organization. Its real strength and substance are in the constituent institutions—organized American Reform Judaism, organized American Conservative Judaism, and organized American Orthodox Judaism, both in their clerical bodies and in their lay bodies, representing five or six thousand synagogues and congregations.

Secondly, in matters of community relations, relations with human rights organizations, civil rights organizations, and the like, such bodies as the Anti-Defamation League and the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council speak for the Jewish community.

In philanthropic fund-raising, the body that does the major work, the agitation and solicitation, is the National United Jewish Appeal, which provides for a vast network of organizations. Policy decisions about spending these funds are made by the Council of

Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds. This council is one of the most influential opinion-molders and policy-makers in American Jewry.

As for relations with the White House: the White House does not want to negotiate with fifty or sixty different spokesmen and institutions, and so the Jewish community was challenged to create a sort of intermittent organization to function when needed. That is the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, which has approximately seventeen members representing the most important organizations.

Intellectual Leadership

In regard to intellectual leadership, I think the rabbinical seminaries and Jewish studies departments, hundreds of them throughout the nation, would be the intellectual spokesmen for American Jewry. At the grass roots, however, the people are best represented by their rabbis, because the rabbis are the only group of professional Jewish leaders to have a permanent constituency.

Are there any persons who could be considered in themselves as national spokesmen for American Jewry? Yes; certain leaders, by virtue of charisma and ability, have risen to national leadership, and their influence should not be underestimated. In the nineteenth century, Simon Wolff, a Washington Jew who was president of the congregation I now serve, was very influential. He enjoyed the friendship of eleven U.S. presidents (from James Buchanan to Theodore Roosevelt), was an architect of the Republican party and a close friend of Abraham Lincoln, and served as U.S. ambassador to Egypt. Other names that come to mind are Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver and Rabbi Stephen Wise. Currently the writer Elie Wiesel stands out as a sensitive and articulate spokesman for Jewish views. So too does Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik.

Among other channels that express and mold Jewish opinion, there is a very influential Jewish press, both community newspapers and magazines. *Commentary* magazine plays a special role as a bridge between Judaism and other faiths on important national issues.

Practically speaking, then, to answer the question "Who are the Jewish opinion-molders?" you have to mention a diversified group

of rabbis, scholars, political leaders, organizational bureaucrats, executives, and, finally, individuals whose influence derives from either wealth or power or great moral stature, such as Justice Brandeis and Albert Einstein.

3. DAVID SAPERSTEIN

I feel a little like Daniel in the lion's den. As a liberal who normally speaks to the converted—to the Jewish community (which is generally liberal) and to the liberal activist components of the Protestant and Catholic communities—I find myself here speaking to the unconverted. (Incidentally, in my opinion, an objective analysis of the public opinion polls that to Rabbi Siegel indicate that the Jewish community is becoming more conservative in fact indicates that the conservatives are talking louder.)

The answer to the question "Who speaks for the Jewish community?" is no different today than it has been for nearly 2,000 years of Jewish history, since 70 A.D. Three groups of persons speak for the Jews: (1) the rabbis, by dint of their scholarship and the respect it gains them, and by dint of their position as the judges in the Jewish legal system; (2) the communal leaders or the elected officials of the Jewish community, to whom the secular authorities normally turn when they seek liaison with the Jewish community; and (3) the "community" itself, for no matter what the rabbis and the communal authorities say, if it isn't accepted into the custom and practice of the community, then it cannot become a reality of Jewish life.

The Source of Authority

I'm more interested in another component of our question: What is the source of the authority by which people speak on behalf of the Jewish community?

In addressing political questions we must ask whether the Jewish tradition is itself liberal or conservative. I think that on questions of *personal* behavior the Jewish tradition is indeed profoundly conservative. But in matters of *public* and *political* behavior, the

Jewish tradition is profoundly liberal. I have yet to hear a cogent argument to the contrary.

I suggest that there is no better way to see the manifestation of Jewish values than in the economic and political activities advocated in historic Jewish communities. In the marketplace, there were regulations not only to make certain that the weights and measures were accurate but also to ensure that there was no misleading advertising or fraudulent sales and even to rescind sales in which an unconscionable profit was made by either the buyer or the seller. The government was responsible for enforcing extensive legislation to protect the environment. Education for all, including the poor, was ensured. Social welfare funds were set up to help the poor, the hungry, the orphans, the elderly, refugees, and the sick. None of this was a matter of volition for either the individual or the community. If the leaders of a community did not set up the various social welfare funds and the school system once the town had grown to a certain size, they would be subject to punishment by the central authorities.

Taken together, these activities represent a vigorous, liberal intervention into the economic and social workings of the society based on the notion that the society, the state, and the government are created to serve the needs of their people. The particular political mechanisms used in historic Jewish communities were not God-ordained mechanisms; they were, rather, the political conclusions of rabbis and other Jewish leaders who tried to apply the eternal values of our tradition to solving their political and economic problems.

"Authority" in the Jewish community today comes from the ability to look at the tradition, to see what the underlying values are, and to interpret these values as individuals and as groups in today's society. There are not necessarily right or wrong answers in such interpretative endeavors. Organizations or individuals look at the tradition and decide (in groups it is done by majority vote) how we can best implement the eternal values of our tradition, given the economic, social, and political realities of today. Those positions then become the "official" view, though not the only "right" view, of the Jewish community. This process, I believe, is in keeping with the entire history of the Jewish people and the Jewish tradition.

REPLY BY RABBI SIEGEL

Judaism is not, historically, a "prophetic" religion. It has always been highly appreciative of prophets, of course, but not until the Reform movement began in the nineteenth century did Judaism begin to call itself a prophetic religion. Judaism is based on rabbinic elaboration of the whole Hebrew Bible, and especially the first five books, the books of the Law, not the books of the Prophets.

I think too that there is a profound misunderstanding of what it means to be "prophetic." The prophets were not revolutionary. They did not call for the overthrow of the government or an equalization of wealth. What they called for was justice, fairness, an end to exploitation of the poor by the rich. Being rich was not wrong in itself, but using wealth to exercise power over judges and other institutions in society was wrong.

I believe that the Jewish community should reflect traditional Jewish teachings about both personal and communal life—and these are conservative. I think there are two main reasons why Jews today are on the other side of the spectrum, the liberal side. First, as has been mentioned, when there was a great struggle for Jewish civil rights in Europe, people who called themselves liberal (though they wouldn't all be called that now) were on the Jews' side of that struggle, while people who called themselves conservative (though, again, they might not be called conservative now) were against it. That memory has persisted in the Jewish mind. In many ways Jewish leaders in our country are fighting the same war, but on a different battlefield. They are therefore not fighting it correctly.

The second explanation of the Jewish voter's liberalism is that he is highly urbanized, highly educated, and probably in a higher economic bracket than most other people, and such groups always reflect a more liberal bias.

Exchange With the Audience

MEMBER OF AUDIENCE: I wonder if Rabbi Saperstein would comment on the apparent rapprochement between the leadership of Israel and certain evangelical and fundamentalist groups in this country. I'm thinking particularly of Rabbi Marc Tannenbaum, who has said that he's on the edge of giving up on mainline liberal Protestantism as a base of reliable support for the aspirations and interests of the Jewish community, and that he is increasingly drawn toward the evangelicals for this support.

RABBI SAPERSTEIN: I suggest that Rabbi Haberman respond to this question also. He has done more good work than almost any other person I know of in the American Jewish community in thoughtfully and carefully cultivating good relationships between the Protestant evangelical community and the mainstream Jewish community.

I would simply say, first, that I read Tannenbaum's remarks differently. I understood him to say that he'd given up on some of the leadership elements of the mainline Protestant churches because he did not believe they reflected where the majority of the members of their churches are. I think that if you look at the same kind of data for the Protestant community that Seymour Siegel cited for the Jewish community, these data will support Tannenbaum's contention.

As for a special relationship of Menachem Begin and Jerry Falwell as a model of Jewish-fundamentalist cooperation: I'm willing to work with any group that agrees with me on certain issues while I continue to respectfully disagree with that group on other issues. The liberal Jewish community doesn't agree with the Catholic community on abortion. I'm willing to respectfully disagree on that while working together on issues where we do agree. I'm

willing to work with the religious right on the issue of Israel. But I will not buy their support for Israel by acquiescing to those areas of their agenda where I profoundly disagree.

I think Menachem Begin is looking at issues only from the standpoint of the needs of Israel, and more particularly, of his needs as the prime minister of Israel. He doesn't think about the consequences of giving legitimacy to some people whose interests, I think, really undermine the interests of the Jewish community. So I'm a little concerned about Begin's praise of Jerry Falwell, but I understand why he's doing it.

I must add that I have yet to hear of a single time that the religious right groups have written their people saying, "Write letters opposing the AWACS sale" or "Write letters in favor of the aid package to Israel." Israel does not appear on the "moral report card" of the Christian Voice. When push came to shove on the AWACS vote, we had the votes of all of the black caucus, all of the Hispanic caucus, all of those supported by labor, but we lost all the New Right votes in the Senate on that issue, with one exception, Al D'Amato (and I don't have to tell you what would happen to a senator from New York who voted on the other side of the AWACS sale!).

RABBI SIEGEL: I disagree on this point. Just yesterday I heard from several senators and congressmen how heavily they're being lobbied by the New Right on behalf of Israel. I think this is one of the greatest developments in the Jewish community and in the Christian community, this—I wouldn't call it a rapprochement, but a joining of hands between Jews and Protestant fundamentalists. Incidentally, when I counted up the recommendations of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, which Rabbi Saperstein so ably represents here in Washington, and the recommendations of the Moral Majority—each had eight, I think—I agreed with seven recommendations of the Moral Majority and I think only two of the Union's.

RABBI HABERMAN: Reference was made to my personal involvement with evangelicals and fundamentalists, and I should like to say that we are indeed witnessing a historic development of great importance. It is attributable not to any one person's sudden

inspiration but to deep-rooted changes in both the evangelical and the Jewish community.

The evangelical community—which includes from 40 to 50 million American Christians—formerly did not get into political issues, did not tackle many of the social and moral questions of today. It was largely theological and ecclesiastic, or church-bound. Gradually it has decided—and for this it ought to be congratulated—to make its contribution to the shaping of America's future.

At the same time, I believe there has been an undercurrent of reassessment in many sections of American Jewry, from Reform to Orthodox, in regard to some of the liberal stances that have been taken, morally, theologically, and politically. There is, in my opinion, a decided shift toward the conservative side, or at least toward the middle.

I have been quite closely involved with notable evangelical leaders during the last five years, and it strikes me that if it is difficult to determine who speaks for Jews, it is probably even more difficult to determine who speaks for evangelicals. We have discovered, after many, many contacts, that there is a great deal of common ground. But as Rabbi Saperstein has said, there are also serious points of division. That will be true of all our interfaith relations.

MEMBER OF AUDIENCE: Both the liberal National Council of Churches and the liberal Jewish community, when they talk about human rights, never look at Russia, China, Cuba, or most of the other Communist states. Now human rights in El Salvador is the issue. Rabbi Saperstein, you say you represent the liberal community. Are you going to line up with the National Council here? Is it human rights in El Salvador that's the key issue now, rather than human rights in Communist states?

RABBI SAPERSTEIN: If you look at our resolutions, you will find that whenever we've talked about human rights, we have condemned the deprivation of human rights on the left and the right, and have emphasized the Soviet Union. That is true of every Jewish organization that I know.

One reason why we often focus on the right as opposed to the left

has to do not with the intrinsic question of human rights but with the question of the role of our own government. Our government tends to support dictatorships on the right more than it supports dictatorships on the left. So when we finish denouncing dictatorships intrinsically and get to talking about what our government could do, it is obvious that we will be talking more about the dictatorships on the right than those on the left.

MEMBER OF AUDIENCE: I think we must distinguish between little villains and big villains. From my perspective, the giant villains are in the Communist world. And I don't think that any intelligent, humanitarian, or even liberal Jew could have any illusions about the satanic nature of Communist regimes.

RABBI SIEGEL: The Jews who are on the extreme left—and that includes some who were the founders of socialism and even Communism—before they took those positions, broke with the Jewish community. I know of no professing *religious* Jews who are even active socialists, certainly none who are Communists. In my judgment, extreme socialism is inimical to Jewish teachings; you can't espouse both at the same time. There are certainly no mainline or even sideline Jewish groups that have expressed any support for outright Communist regimes. When Castro came to power there were 20,000 Jews in Cuba; and now there are, I think, only about 200. I think they all fled as quickly as they could. When Salvador Allende rose to power in Chile, the next day 5,000 Jews—out of only 28,000—applied to leave.

MEMBER OF AUDIENCE: Socialism is theft. Socialism is the use of government to take by force from one group of people and hand over to another group of people, with the self-appointed elite at the top doing the distributing.

RABBI HABERMAN: Despite the altruistic appeal of the abstract idea of socialism, I believe you are right in your view that socialism as a political system is a very bad thing. I have no sympathy for it. But I think you overlook the fact that, especially in the religious communities, some people who have expressed support for socialism are motivated by what they think are justice considerations. They happen to be wrong in thinking that socialism is the

way to produce justice, but I think you're not absolutely fair in not seeing that their motivation is not evil, though their view of reality is mistaken.

RABBI SAPERSTEIN: I don't like black-and-white statements on anything. I'm proud of the fact that every page of the Talmud records, for posterity, minority opinions—some of which remained minority opinions, others of which later became the majority opinions. So I don't like even blanket statements about socialism. I'm not happy with socialism in most manifestations. But in the Bible, expropriation of land by the government to give to other people is called the Jubilee Year; the cancellation of money owed to you, which is your property and is therefore given to other people, is called the Seventh Year. I suggest that one dealing honestly with the Bible has to see in it some minority elements that don't accommodate an absolute anti-socialist view.

I spoke earlier about the normative rulings of the rabbis. Insofar as they believed there was not an intrinsic justice inherent in the workings of the economic system in the marketplace, insofar as they believed the government could and should intervene in order to make the system more fair and to redistribute money to those people who were poor, I would suggest that the normative rulings and the normative working of the Jewish community were economically and socially "liberal."

RABBI SIEGEL: You're not correct. The prophets did not advocate what is now called a "systemic change" in the economic system. They believed in commerce and business, in buying and selling and the profit motive. But they were opposed to the misuse of the system by too much accumulation of power in the hands of people who use that power to exploit other people and to bring about injustice and unfairness. There's a lot of literature, both Jewish and non-Jewish, saying that the prophets were socialists. Either the writers don't know what socialism is or they don't know what prophets are.

RABBI SAPERSTEIN: Here's a good example of a minority opinion being preserved. Whether Rabbi Siegel's or mine is the minority opinion in the Jewish tradition is a question that will be left open today.

MEMBER OF AUDIENCE: Rabbi Siegel suggested that one of the lessons he learns from the experience of the state of Israel is that the only religious kind of politics is secular politics. I would like to hear him elaborate that briefly.

RABBI SIEGEL: What I believe is that political decisions, especially in a pluralistic and democratic society, require compromise, flexibility, arrangements in which everybody gets something and no one gets everything he wants. Therefore, if you insist, as some people in Israel do, that the political decisions—such as the most important one that the state of Israel has to face, what its borders should be—if you insist that such problems should be solved on the basis of scriptural allusions or references, (a) you then rule out any kind of flexibility, (b) you rule out any kind of compromise, and (c) you appeal to an authority that your adversary does not recognize as an authority, and therefore you have no common ground.

The question of the borders of Israel, to take that example, should be decided on what could be called, with some qualifications, secular grounds: what is best for the security of the state of Israel, for the safety of the people, for the future of peace, and so on. I do not believe that political decisions, whether in Washington or Jerusalem or somewhere else, should be based on specific biblical verses. Therefore, the paradox becomes, as I tried to state it, that the most religious kind of politics is the one that's more secular.

RABBI HABERMAN: A persistent subject of discussion here has been the nature of liberalism and conservatism in American Jewry. I'd like to point out that the shift of world Jewry toward a more liberal column is directly tied to the emancipation brought about by the French Revolution.

Prior to that time, for virtually 2,500 years or more, the political behavior of the Jewish community, whether in Israel or elsewhere, as Professor Siegel has indicated, was supportive of established authority. I don't know of a single incident in over 2,000 years of Jewish history in which any Jewish community switched over to the side of populists, a populist rebellion against authority. The Jews, for better or for worse—I'm not going to be judgmental now—tended to be supportive of established authority by the very nature of Judaism as a tradition with great reverence for law.

Now the French Revolution changed that radically, because it provided a drastic change in granting civil rights. But a number of notable Jewish communities refused emancipation because they did not wish to pay the price of secularization. The notable and distinguished Dutch Jewish community of Amsterdam rejected emancipation. The Russian Jewish community, one of the largest religious communities, though they hated the tsar, supported him against Napoleon because they wanted to hold back a revolution whose danger they recognized as undermining the religious tradition and sweeping along the triumph of secularism.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, Jewish leaders had a lot of second thoughts about the new secular paradise. Currently what you find among Jews and especially intellectual Jews is a growing mistrust of government, a loss of confidence in the rationality of man and in the dogmas of the Enlightenment, a lot less enthusiasm for social engineering, a grave suspicion of statism and the concentration of power, and a total loss of confidence and support for collectivism. The latter goes even as far as Israel, where the *kibbutz* settlements themselves are in a state of retrenchment and are switching over to private enterprise.

MEMBER OF AUDIENCE: Rabbi Siegel, you said there's a danger in citing biblical texts to resolve Israel's border problem. But I thought I detected that you were appealing quite directly to the Bible for the determination of economic systems. If so, how do you reconcile what seems to me to be a rather contradictory approach to the use of the Bible?

RABBI SIEGEL: The greatest Jewish heresy historically and now is to be a biblical fundamentalist. To take the Bible literally. We have to read the Bible through rabbinical spectacles. Now, I did make a distinction between general moral principles, which are eternal, in my point of view—such as "Justice shalt thou pursue" and the Ten Commandments—and specific biblical allusions or references that are obviously historically influenced.

The Ten Commandments—to take the most accepted general principles in Western civilization—are not the same as a verse that says that the borders of Palestine or the Promised Land shall be from, say, the Red Sea to the approaches to Lebanon. A verse like

that is historically conditioned by the situation of the Israelites at that time. A much more complicated question concerns the nature of the present state of Israel—is it really the reincarnation of the old Promised Land? In my view of Jewish thought, the Promised Land can be reinstituted only with the coming of the Messiah, and a secret that we Jews have been keeping for a long time is that the Messiah has not yet come. Therefore the borders of the present Jewish community called Israel have to be set, as I said, by secular and historical considerations.

The Bible is not a self-interpreting document, and we have to make distinctions—sometimes in risk and fear and trembling—between general moral and ethical and theological principles which do not change and are not affected by historical conditions and specific principles which obviously reflect a certain scientific, political, and even military situation.

Notes

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4. Cohen, op. cit., p. 107.
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1. American Jewish Congress, *Resolution on Nuclear Arms Limitation*, adopted April 1982 at the Biennial Convention, Grossinger, New York; American Jewish Committee, Defense and Arms Limitation Committee, *Report and Recommendations*, February 1983; Union of American Hebrew Congregations, *Resolution on Nuclear Arms Control*, adopted December 1981 by the General Assembly, Boston, Massachusetts; Synagogue Council of America, *Statement on the Dangers of Nuclear Armaments*, no date; see Charles Austin, "Synagogue Council Endorses Nuclear Freeze," *New York Times*, February 25, 1983.
2. Rabbinical Council of America, *Rabbinical Council of America President Rabbi Gilbert Klaperman Appoints Commission to Explore Jewish Law Implications of the Nuclear Age*, press release, no date.
3. Ben Gallob, "Reconstructionists Open Anti-Nuclear Study Center," *Buffalo Jewish Review*, June 24, 1983. The article suggests that the drafting of religious liturgies on the threat of a nuclear holocaust is planned.
4. Union of American Hebrew Congregations, *Resolution on Nuclear Arms Control*.
5. Agudath Israel of America, *Agudath Israel Rejects Misuse of Jewish Tradition in Nuclear Freeze Debate*, press release, March 21, 1983.

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